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SREESHANKAR TAKES GIANT LEAP TO BOOK OLYMPIC BERTH

Long jumper M Sreeshankar cleared 8.26m for the Games cut, TN's Dhanalakshmi stuns Dutee Chand

DHANALAKSHMI TOO HOGS LIMELIGHT

Tamil Nadu's S Dhanalakshmi stunned the Asian Games medallist and national record holder Dutee Chand to win the 100m event at the Federation Cup. It was also the 22-year-old's maiden title at the nationals. In the much-anticipated sprint final, Hima Das was shown the red card for a false start

NEW NATIONAL RECORD EN ROUTE TOKYO

The 21-year-old from Kerala bettered his own national record in Patiala. Not a part of the jumps national camp, Sreeshankar is training separately under his father S Murali in Palakkad.
Five race walkers, two javelin throwers and the mixed 4x400m relay team have earlier qualified for the Olympics | P15

8.26

SREESHANKAR IMPROVED ON HIS OWN NATIONAL MARK OF 8.20M

Double mutation variant in Maha

Its role in second Covid wave under study; 20% of samples in state had the mutations

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

SCIENTIFIC institutes tasked with genome sequencing of the Covid-19 virus in the country have alerted the Centre on a virus variant with double mutation in Maharashtra, whose possible role in the surge in cases is being probed, this newspaper has gathered.

The institutes working on a project under the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) have alerted the Union Health Ministry to label the variant with double mutation as a likely variant of concern (VOC).

Sources working on the project said so far 7,000 virus samples have been sequenced, of which 200 were lifted from parts of Maharashtra, which has been hit the hardest with the fresh rise in cases.

"Of the samples from Maharashtra, about 20% have two mutations, E484Q and L452R," said a source. "While it is difficult to conclusively say that the variant is behind the surge, it has been established elsewhere that E484Q can escape antibody neutralisation and L452R is

known to increase infectivity and has been linked to large pockets in the US."

The Centre, in December, had formed a genomic surveillance consortium — INSACOG — of 10 institutes under the NCDC to work on genome sequencing of virus samples from various parts of the country amid concerns over detection of the UK variant in India.

A team sent by the Union Health Ministry to Maharashtra had also pointed to a possible role of the variant virus causing the second wave of infections in the state.

Officials said an epidemiological investigation being undertaken by the NCDC, will involve probing whether variants are causing the disease to spread in clusters and whether they are more infectious.

Epidemiologists will also examine whether there is significant digression in clinical outcomes in patients found positive with the variant, and whether people with previous history of infection are also being found re-infected with the mutant virus. P3, P10



Poor contact tracing may be behind spurt

IFFATH FATHIMA & RANJANI MADHAVAN @ Bengaluru

WHILE contact tracing is playing an important part in controlling the spread of Covid-19, it has been very poor in many of the districts over the last seven days, according to the state war room data. Many officials feel this could be one of the reasons for the spurt in cases in Karnataka.

The State Government had recently announced that for every one Covid-positive case, 20 contacts should be identified and traced. However, this isn't being followed. Districts like Haveri, Koppal, Raichur, Vijayapura, Bengaluru Urban have recorded no contacts of patients. Haveri district has recorded two Covid-positive patients in the last seven days, but none of the primary contacts or secondary contacts were traced. P7

FinMin under pressure as RBI wants Bitcoin ban

ANURADHA SHUKLA @ New Delhi

THE RBI and the Finance Ministry are at loggerheads over cryptocurrency. While the RBI is pushing for a blanket ban on cryptocurrency, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman prefers to keep all options open, sources said.

"The RBI has strongly communicated its reservation against cryptocurrency and has recommended a blanket ban," said a senior Finance Ministry official, adding that this was communicated to the government during an informal meeting last week.

"From our side, we are not shutting all options off," Nirmala said recently. This had given some hope to the cryptocurrency sector.

However, if RBI and the government are not on the same page, then the Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021, slated to be taken up in Parliament in the current session, could be delayed.

CABINET NOD FOR D.F.I TO FUND INFRA PROJECTS

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE Union Cabinet on Tuesday cleared the proposal to set up a Development Finance Institution (DFI), which seeks to fix the financing woes of long-term infrastructure projects.

As announced in the Budget, the government will initially infuse ₹20,000 crore in the DFI and raise up to ₹3 lakh crore in the next few years. While DFI will start off as 100 per cent government-owned, the Centre will bring down its stake gradually to 26 per cent.

"Past attempts to have alternative investment funds were taken up, but for various reasons, we ended up with no bank which could take up long-term risk and fund development. Following this, the Union Cabinet has cleared the setting up of a DFI," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

The DFI will get tax benefits for 10 years. The government will also amend the Indian Stamp Act to attract global pension funds and sovereign funds.

CONTINUED ON: P13

PELE NUMBER PAR RONALDO!



Mumbai Police chief faces axe over Waze

SUDHIR SURYAWANSHI @ Mumbai

AFTER the embarrassing arrest of police officer Sachin Waze by the National Investigation Agency, Mumbai Police Commissioner Parambir Singh is likely to be replaced soon.

In the talks Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray had with NCP chief Sharad Pawar on Monday over the mishandling of the bomb scare attempt outside Mukesh Ambani's residence and the death of Thane businessman Mansukh Hire, both leaders agreed on sacking Singh. The meeting went on for more than an hour at the chief minister's official residence.

A senior minister said it has now come to light that Waze had stage-managed the bomb scare on the instructions of Parambir Singh. CONTINUED ON: P10

CID summons former AP CM over land scam

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Vijayawada

THE Andhra Pradesh Crime Investigation Department (CID), which filed an FIR against former chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu in connection with the alleged Amaravati land scam, served a notice on him at his Jubilee Hills residence in Hyderabad on Tuesday. Naidu has been directed to appear in person before the investigating officer at the CID regional office in Vijayawada on March 23.

"Failure to attend or comply with the terms of the notice, you will be liable for arrest under Section 41 (3) and (4) of CrPC," the notice warned.

On Tuesday, *TNIE* broke the story of the CID's FIR against Naidu for allegedly facilitating alienation of assigned lands in violation of the law.

The notice, served by investigating officer A Lakshmi Narayana Rao, identified Naidu as Accused No.1 and said it was necessary to examine him to "ascertain facts which are within your exclusive knowledge."

A similar notice was served on TDP leader Ponguru Narayana Rao, who was the minister for municipal administration and urban development during the TDP regime. The notices were served under Section 41 (A) of the CrPC. CONTINUED ON: P7

CD-GATE

Woman's father claims she was kidnapped in B'luru

NAUSHAD BIJAPUR @ Belagavi

WHILE the CD scandal, allegedly involving former Water Resources Minister Ramesh Jarkiholi, has created a furore across the state, the father of the woman seen in the purported CD has lodged a complaint with the APMC police station in Belagavi on Tuesday alleging that she was kidnapped in Bengaluru and was being harassed by a group of unidentified people.

According to a senior police officer, Prakash Nagappa Kancher (54), a resident of an upscale locality in Belagavi city, stated in his complaint that an unidentified group had kidnapped his daughter in Bengaluru on March 2 and was torturing her.

Kancher also said that his daughter has remained untraced since then. The police have filed a case of kidnap and taken up investigation.

Surprisingly, the Belagavi police were unaware that the woman hailed from the posh locality in the city where most of the VIPs and politicians reside. Even as the SIT, formed to investigate into the scandal, is yet to question the woman, the Belagavi police are expected to launch an operation to trace her. CONTINUED ON: P7

3 complaints against Bhyrappa for 'hurtful' remarks

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE Bengaluru police have received three petitions seeking action against popular writer S L Bhyrappa for his alleged derogatory statements against Draupadi, Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai announced on Tuesday.

Congress MLC P Ramesh, who raised the issue in the Council during Question Hour, demanding legal action against the writer, said Bhyrappa had made a statement at an event in Mysuru on February 21 which was insulting to Draupadi and had hurt the religious feelings of the Thigala community. P5

Brownie points only for babus? We'll go to villages too: MLAs

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @ Bengaluru

ELECTED representatives, who may not have made frequent visits to villages to understand the problems of locals and resolve them, now are more than eager to do so. The reason? They are worried that officials are walking away with all the credit for resolving villagers' problems, leaving them with nothing!

On Tuesday, Congress and JDS MLAs demanded that the State Government include them in the "Graama Vaastavya" programme, in which district Deputy Commissioners and other officials spend 24 hours in a village

hearing out people and trying to solve their problems.

Taking up the issue in the Assembly, the MLAs told Revenue Minister R Ashoka that it is a good initiative, but the Deputy Commissioners are getting all the credit and that elected representatives will be ignored by villagers.

The 'Graama Vaastavya' programme was launched across the state on February 20 with the aim of taking the administration to the villages. Revenue Minister Ashok himself stayed in a village in Doddaballapur taluk of Bengaluru Rural district some weeks ago.

CONTINUED ON: P4



The purpose of this is to give a free hand to officials. People's work has to be done without political intervention

R Ashoka, Revenue Minister

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- Lalithadri Nagar
- Dattagalli 2nd & 3rd Stage
- Gokulam
- Hanchya - Sathagalli
- J.C.S.T. Kuvempunagara